

## **CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Thursday 10 April 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

**Panel Members present** Councillor M. Longhi (Chair)  
Councillor M. Bird  
Councillor J. Cook  
Councillor J. Rochelle  
Councillor J. Phillips  
Councillor H. Sarohi  
Councillor C. Towe  
Councillor D. Turner

**Officers present** James Walsh – Assistant Director – Finance  
Bhupinder Gill - Assistant Director –  
Law & Constitutional Services  
Sarah Homer - Assistant Director - Strategic Transformation  
Lorenzo Visentin - Manager of SHAW Services  
John Pryce-Jones - Corporate Performance Manager -  
Customer Focus & Intelligence  
Chris Davies - Project Office Support Officer  
Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer  
Jody Latham – Performance and Scrutiny Officer

### **67/07 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Nazir.

### **68/07 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

### **69/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

### **70/07 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

It was agreed that apologies for Councillor Cook should be recorded for the meetings that took place on 25 January and 7 February 2008.

### **Resolved**

**That the minutes, as amended, of the meetings held on 25 January 2008 and 7 February 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

(annexed)

## 71/07 FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the Forward Plan that was issued on 7 April 2008.

In regard to issue 22/08 'Approval of draft collective agreement covering new pay structure and assimilation arrangements or, in the absence of such an agreement, alternative measures' Members agreed the issue surrounding job evaluation was significant and one which should be considered by scrutiny.

The Panel were informed that the evaluation was due to be completed towards the end of April 2008 with costings developed by the end of May 2008. From July 2008 Trade Unions would be consulted which may complete in August but have every possibility of running further in to the future.

The Panel asked if there was anything that they could input at this stage to aid the process and agreed that Cabinet would benefit from the input of scrutiny on this matter.

In response to a question the Panel were informed that there was a preferred model for approaching job evaluation already proposed but as yet it had not been costed.

A Member expressed concern about job evaluation going to Cabinet on 18 June 2008 without any form of wider Member consideration or input.

It was recommended that there be a pre-Cabinet meeting for the Panel to evaluate the issue in further detail so recommendations could be made to Cabinet.

The Panel agreed to write to the Leader of the Council recommending that this issue does not go to Cabinet before scrutiny has had a chance to look at it. It was also agreed to invite the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Personnel to the meeting where the Panel considered the issue.

Sarah Homer informed Members that the matter would be considered by Cabinet on more than one occasion before the job evaluation issues were completely resolved and that it was likely to go on for some time.

Concerns were also raised by Members over the Forward Plan itself and Scrutiny's input. Often issues appeared on the plan too late for scrutiny to have any real involvement. Members agreed that a potential scrutiny date should be added to the plan.

### **Resolved**

**That:**

- a) a letter be written to the Leader of the Council to request that any reports relating to Forward Plan Item 22/08 'Approval of draft collective agreement covering new pay structure and assimilation arrangements or, in the absence of such an agreement, alternative measures' be considered by the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel to allow the opportunity for the full implications of any draft proposals to be considered before any formal decisions are taken by Cabinet;**

- b) **The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Personnel be formally invited to the meeting where the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel consider Forward Plan Item 22/08 'Approval of draft collective agreement covering new pay structure and assimilation arrangements or, in the absence of such an agreement, alternative measures';**

**and;**

- c) **a request to have a scrutiny date added to the Forward Plan be made to the Leader of the Council.**

## **72/07 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

The Panel were informed of the training opportunities available to them and advised to contact the Scrutiny Team should they wish to attend any.

## **73/07 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007**

The Panel considered the implications of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIH).

Bhupinder Gill presented an update on the current status of the LGPIH to the Panel.

(annexed)

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- Partners had a 'duty to co-operate' with councils to achieve targets. It was expected that partners would work together to set and agree targets.
- The LGPIH was not yet fully implemented. Many sections of the Act were reliant on further legislation being brought into force.
- The 'duty to co-operate' on council partners did not compel them to attend scrutiny and performance panel meetings. Members were informed that the 'duty to co-operate' may provide more effective encouragement for partners to attend in future. The only alternative may be a court order but this was not recommended but could be used as a measure of last resort.
- The Audit Commission was to reduce its numbers of members and be renamed the 'Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England'.

The Panel expressed concerns over the publishing of complaints against individual Members, before they have been considered by the Standards Board. This was especially unfair with cases when the allegation has proven to be false but often the damage to the Member's name and reputation had already been done. It was felt that if complainants were named alongside the relevant Member that it would help to reduce the number of unfounded complaints.

## **Resolved**

**That the Assistant Director for Law and Constitutional Services write to the Standards Board for England outlining the concerns of Members being named alongside full details of any complaints made against them before the full details of the matter have been considered and assessed.**

### **74/07 SAFETY AND HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Panel were informed of the outcome of three planned inspections by the Health and Safety Executive that took place during 2007.

Lorenzo Visentin explained that as a result of the inspection the HSE focussed on two areas in need of improvement, namely: Stress Management and Asbestos Management. The HSE served five time-scaled improvement notices on the council.

Four of the five improvement notices have been met by the council.

The fifth notice regarding the outgrowing of the North Walsall Depot and the possible dangers surrounding people-vehicle separation has been much harder to rectify. However, the HSE has recognised that the council has done everything possible to improve the situation and has extended the improvement notice deadline to Sept 2010 which is the date that the site is expected to close following relocation of all staff and services currently based there.

The Panel were informed of the CLASP building programme in the 1970s that was responsible for the asbestos problem now experienced across the country. In Walsall there were 12 schools and a total of 70 buildings affected by asbestos all of which have been made safe via the sealing of posts and ceilings.

In response to a question regarding the 'red' point on page 57 of the Safety and Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) 'undertake assessment of the risk of violence and aggression in Social Care premises and consider whether panic alarms/ staff attack systems are required' the Panel were told that this is due to a conflict in anecdotal reports, which suggested that violent occurrences were higher than the number of formally reported incidents. It was vital that incidents were reported so that staff could be adequately trained to deal with incidents. This issue is currently undergoing review.

In response to a question regarding the 'red' point on page 94 of the SHIP 'Carry out fire risk assessment paying particular attention to the disabled and those with special needs, as well as any dangerous substances on the premises' the Panel were informed that the point was no longer red and that risk assessments had been carried out since the report had last been drafted. The Panel were also informed that sprinkler systems are being fitted in all new builds and any buildings being completely renovated.

In response to a question regarding Vibrating Arm Syndrome or Vibration White Finger the Panel were informed that claims can be made dating back 40 years that are in relation to the use of vibrating machinery such as drills or heavy works machinery. There are currently two cases being processed within Walsall Council which related to the use of chain saws.

A revisit by the HSE is expected in September 2008 to ensure improvements made are still being maintained.

## **75/07 REVENUES AND BENEFITS – ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The Panel reviewed the impact on performance of the new Revenues and Benefits electronic document management system (EDMS).

James Walsh gave an overview to the Panel on the status of EDMS focusing on the key achievements of the year.

The introduction of EDMS has seen record processing times for benefit claims reducing the waiting time from 106 days, using the paper method, to just 27 days using the EDMS. This has exceeded the original target of 36 days.

Amongst other benefits the system has eliminated the paper process saving in excess of 300,000 sheets of paper per year and has resulted in the removal of 600 filing cabinets freeing up space to accommodate staff saving £90,000 in accommodation costs.

In response to a question about further reducing the processing time for benefits applications, the Panel were told that the need for any further reductions would have to be assessed based on the cost/benefit of reducing further. Current times are seen as more than acceptable considering past performance therefore there may not be a need to devote resources to reduce times further.

The noticeable benefits of the new system are faster access to information, greater consistency, standardisation of processes, automation of repetitive tasks, increased quality of work and reduced costs of storage and retrieval of paper files.

The Panel were informed that it could be possible to roll out EDMS in other service areas but this would have to be taken up by the relevant service area in conjunction with ICT. The Panel agreed that due to its success in Revenues and Benefits EDMS was something that should seriously be considered for use across all council directorates. It was suggested that it may be of great benefit to Planning Services files and that consideration should be given to development of the EDMS in this area.

The Panel wished to congratulate all Officers involved in the EDMS system and resolved to write a letter to staff thanking them for their efforts.

### **Resolved**

#### **That:**

**The Panel write a letter expressing their congratulations to Officers involved in the successful implementation of the Electronic Document Management System in Revenues and Benefits.**

## 76/07 PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE

The Panel were informed of improvements being made in embedding Project Management within the council.

Chris Davies provided the Panel with an overview of the Project Management processes and the project management support being provided by the Project Management Office (PMO) for Walsall Council.

In 2004 it was identified that the council was failing to deliver on its large projects. In order to address this weakness it was decided to implement a standardised PM system to create a standardised approach to project delivery. A report to the Strategic Leadership Team in April 2005 recommended the implementation of a recognised PM methodology such as Prince2 to rectify the problem.

In August 2005 the PM Office was established and the Walsall Project Approach developed using best practice elements from a range of PM approaches. The office reports to the Corporate Management Team on a monthly basis and to Cabinet quarterly.

Training sessions have been conducted and have trained over 238 employees in the Walsall Project Approach and a further 138 in risk awareness.

A computer based system has now been developed to mirror the paper based approach which will automate many of the processes and tasks currently undertaken. This will help to reduce time and costs while improving quality of the outputs. It will aid Project Managers in keeping track of their projects and assist with the evaluation of the overall success of each project.

The computer based system will be developed to identify and measure benefits management, issue resolution and resource management. It is expected that all training will be complete by the end of May 2008 and the system fully operational by June 2008.

The Panel were informed that they will have read-only access to the PM system enabling them to visually see live data on the progression of projects as they happen.

Having been on the training course the Chairman encouraged other members of the Panel to think about attending. Courses can be booked via the Project Management Office

The Panel thanked officers for their hard work in the successful implementation of the PM framework.

77/07 **CARRY FORWARD ITEMS**

**Resolved:**

**That the following issues be considered by the reconstituted Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel for addition to their work programme for 2008/09:**

- **Procurement Working Group**
- **Welfare Rights Service**
- **Analysis of Sustainable Community Strategy feedback**
- **Local Authority Business Growth Incentive funding**
- **Safety and Health Improvement Plan monitoring**
- **Electronic Document Management System**
- **Job Evaluation**
- **Information Communication Technology Service**

The meeting terminated at 7.56 p.m.

Chair:

Date:

**DRAFT**